

Health Tourism in Clinics Located in Tourist Areas: the Case of Spain

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Abstract: *Objective:* Knowing the characteristics of health tourism and to develop a theoretical framework exploring empirical evidence the health tourism in Spain studying major competitive methods, the aim is to objectively examine the lines of action being taken by the clinics to then offer a theory of how to compete successfully in the medical tourism business.

Method: Apply a descriptive quantitative approach to analyze data collected through a questionnaire distributed to 148 clinics in 50 provinces, in 2011.

Results: Tourist offers medical services are mainly aimed at German, British and French citizens. 91.46% of the centers surveyed say their services are designed for tourists. There are agreements with hotels / apartments according to 59.52% of the sample, stating that the 66.67% refuse to work with health tourism and wellness, which could offer service centers / clinics in the rest of Spain and abroad.

Conclusions: There is a high demand for health tourism. Tour operators play an important role in the management of these services, as well as in the design of travel packages and medical services adapted to the expectations and needs of tourists. The most popular services include: emergencies, plastic surgery, and clinical analyses.

It is noted that there is a strong presence of marketing and advertising around the sector, as well as efforts by hospitals to train employees to this section of business.

Keywords: Leadership, Management, Health tourism, Wellness clinics, Spain.

INTRODUCTION

Health tourism is defined as the export of Health Services focused on 4 specific areas: curative medicine, aesthetic medicine, preventive medicine and wellness. There are various ways of doing tourism and health can be an important reason to make a trip to another city or to another country other than where you live. But health tourism can also refer to making a trip to a specific destination to disconnect from the pressure of everyday life and contribute to improving situations that generate stress. Thus, health tourism encompasses medical tourism and wellness [1].

According to WTO (World Tourism Organization), Spain is the fourth most visited country in the world and the data related to international tourism reflect the potential of this sector in the Spanish economy. In 2011 57% of the 99.9 million visitors were tourists, 7.6% more than the previous year, and the total expenses generated by these tourists amounted to 58.851 million euros, 5% more than the previous year, with 55% of

the tourists coming from the United Kingdom, Germany and France [1].

Research in the management of clinics in tourist sites makes an important contribution towards establishing a scientific basis for practicing health care in areas for tourism [2].

Generally, the health tourism industry in Spain is characterised by a wide network of modern clinics and qualified medical professionals with adequate training. Also, we must highlight some advantages of the Spanish healthcare for residents in Europe, among which is the wide range of health services that are free in the country of origin for senior citizens and can be taken by private insurers in Spain, such as check-ups, resonances, tests and other diagnostic tests. In addition, waiting lists for certain medical services and treatments in Spain are significantly lower than those in other countries such as the United Kingdom, where it may take more than three years between a first visit or possible surgery. These advantages make Spain an attractive destination for treatment of medical and health services [3].

On the other hand, there are major changes in the shareholdings of large national health groups in terms

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of ownership of social capital resulting in a series of corporate operations, in a process of concentration in the sector, against a traditional model of clinic owned by a group of doctors, developing two differentiating models: clinics of high standing and technology and clinics with a very marked monographic profile [4].

The best clinics offer the patients a follow-up of operation in the patients' country, avoid false expectations, inform about the details of the operation and avoid extreme treatments. In the interest of the patient's safety and the surgeon's peace of mind, the Spanish clinics usually recommend first to do tourism, then undergo the operation and finally rest to optimize the recovery.

The private health sector has experienced significant growth in recent years as it offers advantages such as reduced waiting lists for certain specialties, quality of treatment and facilities and access to treatments not covered by the public health system [2]. Tourists in search of health and wellbeing choose Spain for its affordable prices, the reputation of surgeons, clinics and climate. The clinics that are looking for users of this type of tourism are located mostly in Madrid, Costa del Sol, Alicante, Murcia, Barcelona, Madrid, the Canary Islands and the Balearic Islands [2].

Foreign demand in the Spanish private medical sector is recent and is growing fast. Mainly patients from Italy, England, Germany and France and to a lesser extent from Portugal, Great Britain and Sweden head this demand. This demand grows among other facts, because Spanish legislation in this respect, allows treatments not available in other countries, at more competitive prices for high quality services [5, 12, 13].

It must be added that Spain can also offer a very attractive complementary tourist offer, combining its quality medical supply with the tourist resources of the area. The RESA Study (Indicators of Health Results of Private Health in Spain) in 2015, which consists of 25 indicators that are broken down to a total of 46, between quantitative and qualitative, show very satisfactory results. The results reflect improvements in the management of care, accessibility, quality and safety of the patient and decrease of inter-clinic variability in almost all indicators [6].

After observing the increase in health and wellness tourism in Spain, we decided to carry out a study aimed at understanding the lines of action being carried out by

Spanish clinics in tourist places, in order to successfully compete in the medical tourism business and generate empirical evidence on health tourism in Spain.

The objectives of the study were:

- To know the characteristics of health tourism in Spain.
- Analyse the main methods and lines of action that are helping these clinics to compete successfully in the health tourism business.
- Generate empirical evidence on health tourism in Spain from the analysis of clinics operating in tourist areas.

METHOD

A descriptive, cross-sectional and quantitative study was carried out. The data are collected through a 15-question survey and data for the social demographic characterization of the sample [7].

The population study consisted of 148 clinics located in the tourist areas spread throughout the country, which is to say the 50 Spanish provinces [8, 9].

We contacted at least once each of the clinics via mail or telephone, explaining the study and requesting their collaboration. It was considered that the manager or director of the clinic is the most appropriate source of information to collect information for this research.

The questionnaire was sent to 10% of the clinics to evaluate their adequacy and to proceed with the validation of the instrument. Once validated, 85 clinics submitted to the sample answered, 58% with a sample error of 7.1% for a 95% confidence level [7, 9].

The final version of the questionnaire contains a total of 15 questions asking about management and direction, analyzing the demand for health tourism, and collecting data for a sociodemographic characterisation [9, 10].

The variables were coded and the data contained in each of the valid surveys were tabulated. After completing the data entry, the file was cleansed to detect possible errors that might have been committed in the data transcription process. It was verified that all the codes of the categorical variables were among the possible ones, and that the values of the numerical variables were within the permissible ranges. When

anomalies were identified, the questionnaire to which they belonged was identified and, once the response was verified, the pertinent correction was made in the data file [9, 11].

Statistical analysis is performed with the SPSS program for Windows - version 18. Procedures of descriptive statistics are applied. And the results are presented as mean, standard deviation and absolute and relative frequencies.

RESULTS

The demand for tourism in the health sector in Spain comes mainly from countries such as Germany (75%), the United Kingdom (73.81%) and France (32.14%), which are insured with agreements with foreign insurers (97.62%). 91.46% of the studied centres say that their services are designed with tourists in mind, although only 38.67% report that this happens in most of these services.

59.52% of respondents have agreements with hotels / apartments for the care of tourists, and 66.67% do not work with agent specialized in health and wellness tourism.

Among those in charge of the institutions, 98.53% are Directors or Managers, with a medium age of 47.4 years, most of them are men (77.03%), Spaniards (83.56%), with Medical studies (41.10%), and an average of 9 years in the profession.

Among the services / treatments / surgeries offered by these institutions, the ones that present the highest demand among tourists are emergency services (71.43%), plastic and aesthetic surgery (32.14%) and clinical analysis (27,38%). On the other hand, the services of pathological anatomy and stomatology, dentistry and implantology are the ones with the lowest demand (1.19%).

94% of the respondents consider very important that the medical centre has an excellent reputation and image, which conveys security and confidence. They also mention how relevant it is that the center is innovative and dynamic, as well as the quality of its facilities and equipment, and that it is cosy, comfortable and attractive.

Although international quality certification is considered to be of great value by 61.4% of those respondents, 38.6% say that such certification is not important. Regarding competitiveness and services

offered, 76.2% emphasize the importance of professionalism, the reputation of the Spanish medical system and the area in which the centre is located, 86.9%, also refer to the service being efficient and professional. The tourism environment, with its offers and services is considered of high importance for these professionals (82.1%). In addition they receive high valuations the services of lodging and leisure in the tourist zone, and the possibility of combining the services of health and well-being.

Approximately 25% of respondents consider the importance of lower treatment costs in Spain with respect to the country of origin of the tourist, and that the quality / price ratio is superior, besides being very important and attractive aspects for the tourists. The aspects related to patient care (waiting list, communication and information) are also considered of high importance in the attractiveness for tourists.

A joint analysis of marketing and attracting tourists indicates that the selection of employees with knowledge of foreign languages (63.1%), the development of websites and brochures with information in foreign languages (81%), and the existence of a department specialised in foreign patient care, are the actions most valued by the institutions.

According to those responsible for the institutions, the commercial and marketing department (44.05%) and the customer service department (27.38%) are considered the most important for the tourism sector.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The discussion of the results is the explanation analysis and confrontation of these with reality (14). The results obtained in this study will be confronted with the authors consulted. According to Serrano (2012), the discussion of the results is the analysis, explanation and confrontation of them with reality. Discussion is considered the most appropriate place to reflect the validity of the study, comment its limitations and explain in which line the research should continue.

Most of the documents consulted show that health tourism is an industry that has experienced considerable growth in the last eight years worldwide, highlighting the considerable increase in countries such as the United Kingdom, Singapore, Turkey and Mexico, among others, while in Spain the highest demand comes from Germany, the United Kingdom and France. The OECD report also confirms the continued global

growth in international patient flow over the last decades. Market Health Tourism Study by Carana Corporation (2011), Lizarralde E. (2015).

Authors such as Hernández A. *et al.* (2015) emphasize such aspects as the importance of health marketing, stressing the importance of providing appropriate environmental and care services, at the right time, in a pleasant place, and achieving a reasonable compensation. Incorporating the concept that marketing is not alien to the field of healthcare, and the urgent need for adequate training.

The importance of language training for the care of the health tourist is emphasized. It is necessary to offer adapted health packages, taking into account the needs of the client. The experts consulted highlight the need to have a specialized department for tourist assistance and have an official website containing information of interest for all services offered, also available in the languages of the countries of origin.

Concerning infrastructures, the data show the impact of the corporate image and establishments, pointing out technology, innovation and modernization as elements that inspire confidence. It emphasizes the importance of the continuous training of the personnel in the tourist attention and the offer of jobs, the tendency to select experienced staff, with qualification and language skills.

This study highlights the importance of this type of business, oriented to health, highlighting the quality of services as an element of attracting customers. Therefore, it is necessary to credit the centres through international quality standards.

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